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VERSES BY SARAH ORNE JEWETT

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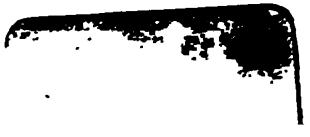
Sarah Orne Jewett
AT SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE

BEQUEATHED BY
Theodore Jewett Eastman
A.B. 1901 - M.D. 1905
1931



VERSES

VERSES

BY

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VERSES

TO MY FATHER

I

WHEN in the quiet house I sat alone,
Sometimes I heard your footfall drawing near;
And with a thrill of gladness open wide
I flung my door to bid you welcome, dear.
Sometimes you did not even speak to me,
But left me quickly when our eyes had met
And you had kissed me—ah, how tenderly!
Light were the tasks the busy day had set;
I had grown braver for the sight of you;
Out of your sight I was not left alone.
A thousand times across the land and sea
Your loving thoughts straight to my heart have flown,
Returned from that far country of the stars.
Again you find me in the quiet room,—
Your angelhood has lent your love fleet wings
To make the journey through the evening's gloom.
How can I miss you, though the days are long
And dark with sorrow since I saw you die,
Though like a dream my changed life seems to me,
With all its pleasures stolen suddenly?
Who is so alive as he the world calls dead!
What heart so loving as the heart that waits,

Not cold and still, but quick with tenderness!
No other hand will lead me through the gates.
Your great sweet love is ever close to me
To bring me courage, and my soul to keep.
Heaven's peace you bring who ever brought me earth's,
And some fair day I too shall fall on sleep.

TO MY FATHER

II

I HEARD to-day the first sweet song of spring—
A blue-bird's eager note, so faint and far,
Across the fields; and first I was so glad.
I thought of summer, and the flowers that are
Waiting for that glad day when they can bloom.
But quick again my heart was sorrowing:
It was mistaken in its winter's end.
I think I never was so grieved and sad,
And in my mind there was no longer room
For any thought but of that dearest friend
Who taught me first the beauty of these days—
To watch the young leaves start, the birds return,
And how the brooks rush down their rocky ways,
The new life everywhere, the stars that burn
Bright in the mild, clear nights. Oh! he has gone,
And I must watch the spring this year, alone.

ASSURANCE

IT sometimes happens that two friends will meet,
And with a smile and touch of hands again
Go on their way along the noisy street.
Each is so sure of all the friendship sweet,
The loving silence gives no thought of pain.
And so I think those friends whom we call dead
Are with us. It may be some quiet hour,
Or time of busy work for hand and head,
Their love fills all the heart that missed them so.
They bring a sweet assurance of the life
Serene above the worry that we know,
And we are braver for the comfort brought.
Why should we grieve because they do not speak
Our words that lie so far below their thought?

THE GLOUCESTER MOTHER

WHEN autumn winds are high,
They wake and trouble me
With thoughts of people lost
A-coming on the coast,
And all the ships at sea.

How dark, how dark and cold
And fearful in the waves,
Are tired folk who lie not still
And quiet in their graves
In moving waters deep
That will not let men sleep
As they may sleep on any hills,
May sleep ashore till time is old
And all the earth is frosty cold.
Under the flowers a thousand springs
They sleep and dream of many things.

God bless them all who die at sea!
If they must sleep in restless waves,
God make them dream they are ashore
With grass above their graves!

FLOWERS IN THE DARK

LATE in the evening, when the room had grown
Too hot and tiresome with its flaring light
And noise of voices, I stole out alone
Into the darkness of the summer night.
Down the long garden-walk I slowly went;
A little wind was stirring in the trees;
I only saw the whitest of the flowers,
And I was sorry that the earlier hours
Of that fair evening had been so ill spent,
Because, I said, I am content with these
Dear friends of mine who only speak to me
With their delicious fragrance, and who tell
To me their gracious welcome silently.
The leaves that touch my hand with dew are wet;
I find the tall white lilies I love well.
I linger as I pass the mignonette,
And what surprise could dearer be than this:
To find my sweet rose waiting with a kiss!

BOAT SONG

OH, rest your oars and let me drift
While all the stars come out to see!
The birds are talking in their sleep
As we go by so silently.
The idle winds are in the pines;
The ripples touch against the shore.
Oh, rest your oars and let me drift,
And let me dream forevermore!

The sweet wild roses hear and wake,
And send their fragrance through the air;
The hills are hiding in the dark,
There is no hurry anywhere.
The shadows close around the boat,
Ah, why should we go back to shore!
So rest your oars, and we will float
Without a care forevermore.

Oh, little waves that plash and call,
How fast you lead us out of sight!
And we must follow where you go
This strange and sweet midsummer night;

The quiet river reaches far —
  The darkness covers all the shore;
With idle oars we downward float
  In starlight dim forevermore.

TOP OF THE HILL

GREEN slope of autumn fields,
And soft November sun,
And golden leaves—they linger yet,
While tasselled pines new fragrance get,
Though summer-time is done.

The hedge-rows wear a veil
Of glistening spider threads,
And in the trees along the brook
The clematis, like whiffs of smoke,
Its faded garland spreads.

See, here upon my hand,
This gauzy-winged wild bee!
Now that the winds are laid,
He suns him unafraid
Of winter-time or me.

I love the steepled town,
The river winding down,
The slow salt tide that creeps
Beside a shore that sleeps,
Dark with its pine woods' crown.

Here, high above them all
  Upon my broad-backed hill,
Far from shrill voices I,
And near the sun and sky,
  Can look and take my fill.

I breathe the sweet air in,
  While lower drops the sun,
And brighter all too soon
Grows the pale hunter's moon,
  The whole year's fairest one.

Oh, lovely light that fades
  Too soon from sky and field,
Oh, days that are too few,
How can I gather you,
  Or treasure what you yield!

Oh, sunshine, warm me through,
  And, soft wind, blow away
My foolishness, my fears,
And let some golden years
  Grow from this golden day!

AT HOME FROM CHURCH

THE lilacs in the sunshine lift
  Their plumes of dear old-fashioned flowers
Whose fragrance fills the silent house
  Where, left alone, I count the hours.

High in the apple-trees the bees
  Are humming, busy in the sun;
An idle robin cries for rain
  But once or twice, and then is done.

The Sunday morning stillness holds
  In heavy slumber all the street,
While from the church just out of sight
  Behind the elms, comes slow and sweet

The organ's drone, the voices faint
  That sing the quaint long-metre hymn—
I somehow feel as if shut out
  From some mysterious temple, dim

And beautiful with blue and red
  And golden lights from windows high,

Where angels in the shadows stand,
  And earth seems very near the sky.

The day-dream fades, and so I try
  Again to catch the tune that brings
No thought of temple or of priest,
  But only of a voice that sings.

TOGETHER

I WONDER if you really send
These dreams of you that come and go!
I like to say, "She thought of me,
And I have known it." Is it so?

Though other friends are by your side,
Yet sometimes it must surely be
They wonder where your thoughts have gone—
Because I have you here with me.

And when the busy day is done,
When work is ended, voices cease,
And everyone has said good-night
In fading twilight, then, in peace,

Idly I rest; you come to me,
Your dear love holds me close to you.
If I could see you face to face,
It would not be more sweet and true.

And now across the weary miles
Light from my star shines. Is it, dear,
You never really went away—
I said farewell, and—kept you here?

A CAGED BIRD

HIGH at the window in her cage,
The old canary sits and sings,
Nor sees across the curtain pass
The shadow of a swallow's wings.

A poor deceit and copy this
Of larger lives that count their span,
Unreckoning of wider worlds,
Or gifts that Heaven keeps for man!

She gathers piteous bits and shreds,
This solitary mateless thing,
Patient to build again the nest
So rudely scattered spring by spring;

And sings her brief, unheeded songs,
Her dreams of bird-life wild and free,
Yet never beats her prison bars
At sound of song from bush or tree.

Yet in my busiest hours I pause,
Held by a sense of urgent speech,

Bewildered by that spark-like soul
  Able my very soul to reach.

She will be heard; she chirps me loud
  When I forget those gravest cares,
Her small provision to supply—
  Clear water or the seedsman's wares.

She begs me now for that chief joy
  The round great world is made to grow—
Her wisp of greenness. Hear her chide
  Because my answering thought is slow!

What can my life seem like to her?
  A dull, unpunctual service mine,
Stupid before her eager speech,
  Her flitting steps, her insight fine!

To open wide thy prison door,
  Poor friend, would give thee to thy foes;
And yet a plaintive note I hear,
  As if to tell how slowly goes

The time of thy long prisoning.
  Bird! does some promise keep thee sane?
Will there be better days for thee?
  Will thy soul too know life again?

Ah, none of us have more than this—
  If one true friend green leaves can reach
From out some fairer, wider place,
  And understand our wistful speech!

STAR ISLAND

HIGH on the lichened ledges, like
A lonely sea-fowl on its perch,
Blown by the cold sea-winds it stands,
The quaint, forsaken Gosport church.

No sign is left of all the town
Except a few forgotten graves;
But to and fro the white sails go
Slowly across the glittering waves.

And summer idlers stray about,
With curious questions of the lost
And vanished village and its men
Whose boats by these same waves were tossed.

I wonder if the old church dreams
About its parish, and the days
The fisher-people came to hear
The preaching and the songs of praise.

Rough-handed, browned with sun and wind,
Heedless of fashion or of creed,

They listened to the parson's words—
  Their pilot heavenward indeed.

Their eyes on week-days sought the church,
  Their surest landmark, and the guide
That led them home from far at sea,
  Until they anchored safe beside.

The harbor-wall still braves the storm
  With its resistless strength of stone.
Now busy fishers all are gone,
  The church is standing here alone.

. . . . . .

I know the blue sea covers some,
  And others in the rocky ground
Found narrow lodgings for their bones.
  God grant their rest is sweet and sound!

I saw the worn rope idle hang
  Beside me in the belfry brown.
I gave the bell a solemn toll:—
  I rang the knell for Gosport town.

THE WIDOWS' HOUSE

[AT BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA]

WHAT of this house with massive walls
And small-paned windows, gay with blooms?
A quaint and ancient aspect falls
Like pallid sunshine through the rooms.

Not this new country's rush and haste
Could breed, one thinks, so still a life;
Here is the old Moravian home,
A placid foe of worldly strife.

For this roof covers, night and day,
The widowed women poor and old,
The mated without mates, who say
Their light is out, their story told.

To these the many mansions seem
Dear household fires that cannot die;
They wait through separation dark
An endless union by and by.

Each window has its watcher wan
To fit the autumn afternoon,
The dropping poplar leaves, the dream
Of spring that faded all too soon.

Upon the highest window-ledge
A glowing scarlet flower shines down.
Oh, wistful sisterhood, whose home
Has sanctified this quiet town!

Oh, hapless household, gather in
The tired-hearted and the lone!
What broken homes, what sundered love,
What disappointment you have known!

They count their little wealth of hope
And spend their waiting days in peace,
What comfort their poor loneliness
Must find in every soul's release!

And when the wailing trombones go
Along the street before the dead
In that Moravian custom quaint,
They smile because a soul has fled.

DUNLUCE CASTLE

TO–DAY upon thy ruined walls
The flowers wave flags of truce,
For time has proved thy conqueror,
And tamed thy strength, Dunluce!

Marauders in their clanking mail
Ride from thy gates no more,—
Lords of the Skerries' cruel rocks,
Masters of sea and shore.

Thy dungeons are untenanted,
Thy captives are set free;
The daisy with sweet childish face
Keeps watch and ward o'er thee.

DISCONTENT

DOWN in a field, one day in June,
The flowers all bloomed together,
Save one who tried to hide herself,
And drooped, that pleasant weather.

A robin who had flown too high
And felt a little lazy
Was resting near this buttercup
Who wished she were a daisy.

The daisies grow so trig and tall,—
She always had a passion
For wearing frills around her neck
In just the daisies' fashion.

And buttercups must always be
The same old tiresome color—
While daisies dress in gold and white,
Although their gold is duller.

"Dear robin," said this sad young flower,
"Perhaps you'd not mind trying

To find a nice white frill for me
Some day when you are flying."

"You silly thing!" the robin said,
"I think you must be crazy.
I'd rather be my honest self
Than any made-up daisy.

"You're nicer in your own bright gown,—
The little children love you.
Be the best buttercup you can,
And think no flower above you.

"Though swallows leave me out of sight,
We'd better keep our places;
Perhaps the world would all go wrong
With one too many daisies.

"Look bravely up into the sky
And be content with knowing
That God wished for a buttercup
Just here, where you are growing."

A FOUR-LEAVED CLOVER

DEAR Polly, these are joyful days!
Your feet can choose their own
sweet ways;
You have no care of anything.
Free as a swallow on the wing,
You hunt the hayfield over
To find a four-leaved clover.

But this I tell you, Polly dear,
One thing in life you need not fear:
Bad luck, I'm certain, never haunts
A child who hunts for what she wants,
And hunts a hayfield over
To find a four-leaved clover.

The little leaf is not so wise
As it may seem in foolish eyes;
But then, dear Polly, don't you see
If you are willing carefully
To hunt the hayfield over,
You find your four-leaved clover?

Your patience may have long to wait,
Whether in little things or great,
But all good luck, you soon will learn,
Must come to those who nobly earn.
Who hunts the hayfield over
Will find the four-leaved clover!

Now put it in your dear trig shoe—
Lovers by scores will flock to you.
Dear Polly, you will always find
Both friends and fortune true and kind;
So hunt the hayfield over
And keep the four-leaved clover!

A CHILD'S GRAVE

MORE than a hundred years ago
They raised for her this little stone;
"Miss Polly Townsend, aged nine,"
It says, is sleeping here alone.

'T was hard to leave your merry mates
For ranks of angels robed and crowned,
To sleep until the judgment day
In Copp's Hill burying-ground.

You must have dreaded heaven then—
A solemn doom of endless rest,
Where white-winged seraphs tuned their harps—
You surely liked this life the best!

The gray slate headstones frightened you,
When from Christ Church your father brought
You here on Sunday afternoon,
And told you that this world was nought;

And you spelled out the carven names
Of people who beneath the sod,

Hidden away from mortal eyes,
  Were at the mercy of their God.

You had been taught that He was great—
  You only hoped He might be good—
An awful thought that you must join
  This silent neighborhood!

Did you grow up to womanhood
  In Heaven, and did you soon lose sight,
Because you are so happy there,
  Of this world's troubles infinite?

No one remembers now the day
  They buried you on Copp's Hill-side;
No one remembers you, or grieves
  And misses you, because you died.

I see the grave and serious men
  And pious women, meek and mild,
Walk two by two in company,
  The mourners for this little child.

The harbor glistened in the sun;
The bell in Christ Church steeple tolled;
And all her playmates cried for her—
Miss Polly Townsend, nine years old.

THE SPENDTHRIFT DOLL

AS I was coming down the street,
I saw the saddest sight;
Sitting before a candy-shop,
A doll all dressed in white.
A Paris hat was on her head,
Her eyes were china blue,
And, looking down below her gown,
I saw her pink kid shoe.

Her veil thrown back showed me that her
Expression was refined;
Her carriage-top was folded down,
Her sash was tied behind.
Beside her sat a shaggy dog,
And, as I came too near,
His growls, though not so very loud,
Were terrible to hear.

Just then the shop-door opened wide
And out two children came;
The last one several bundles bore,
The first one just the same.

And some they put behind the doll,
  And some before her lay;
And taking now the horse's place
  They turned to go away.

We, who are good, can't understand
  Such very wicked ways;
There must have been at least a pound
  Of candy in the chaise!
The money she so idly spends
  She might so wisely use —
Buy some poor doll a Sunday hat,
  Or week-day pair of shoes;

To outgrown and old-fashioned dolls
  She might be such a friend;
To heathen dolls in savage lands
  Improving books might send.
'T is sad to think that one so small
  Can be so great in sin.
I fear my tears will form a lake
  And I shall fall therein!

THE LITTLE DOLL THAT LIED

"WHY, Polly! What 's the matter, dear?
You look so very sad:
Has your new doll been taken ill?
It cannot be so bad!"
Nine of the dolls sit in a row,
But there is one beside—
See in the corner, upside-down,
The little doll that lied!

Out in the corner, all alone,
The wicked doll must stay!
None of the rest must speak to her,
Or look there while they play.
All her best clothes, except her boots,
Are safely put aside
(Her boots are painted on her feet)—
The little doll that lied!

Oh, lying's such a naughty thing!
Why, she might swear and steal.
Or murder someone, I dare say;
Just think how we should feel

To have her in a prison live,
Or, worse than that, be hung!
What won't she do when she is old,
If she did this so young?

And now the silver mug and spoon
Come into use again,
And down the faces of the dolls
The tears run fast as rain.
Three have tipped over in their grief,
Their tears cannot be dried;
Their handkerchiefs are dripping wet—
The little doll has lied!

THE FALLEN OAK

WHERE the oak fell, a great road leads away,
Across the country to the door of day,
To find no ending where the sky begins:—
What the oak knew our larger outlook wins.

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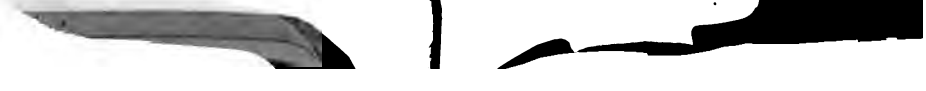
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